LONGWOOD
RESEARCH DATA MANAGEMENT

File Naming Conventions

What are file naming

conventions?

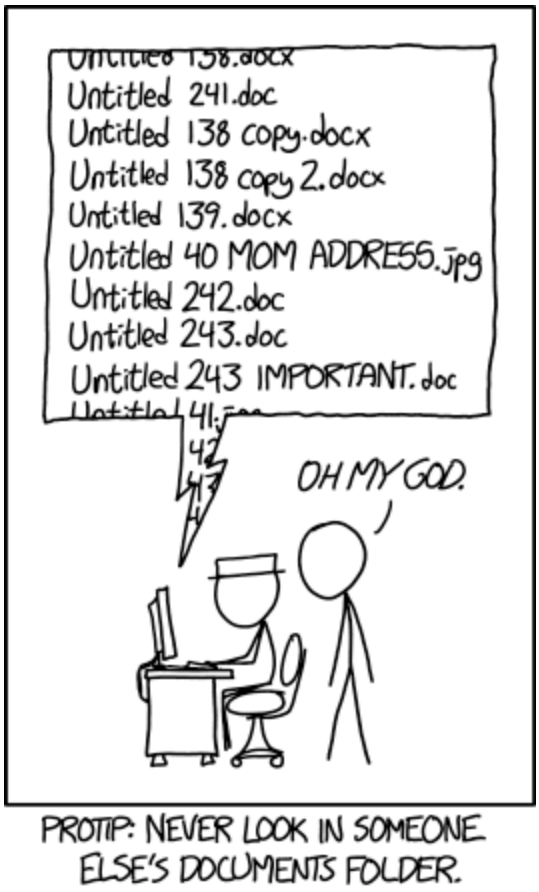

Image:*xkcd.* "Documents." Shared under CC-BY-NC License.

To maximize access to your records, we recommend establishing a naming convention for your files.

A file naming convention is a framework for naming your files in a way that describes what they contain and how they relate to other files.

File naming conventions help you stay organized and quickly identify your files. In a shared or collaborative group file-sharing setting, it will help others more easily navigate your work.

It is ***essential*** to establish a convention ***before*** you begin collecting files or data in order to prevent a backlog of unorganized content that will lead to misplaced or lost data!

Example File Names

No naming convention:

- Test data 2016.xlsx
- Meeting notes Jan 17.doc
- Notes Eric.txt
- Final FINAL last version.docx

With a naming convention:

- 20160104_ProjectA_Ex1Test1_SmithE_v1.xlsx
- 20160104_ProjectA_MeetingNotes_SmithE_v2.docx
- ExperimentName_InstrumentName_CaptureTime_ImageID.tif

Tips for File Naming

The following tips were adapted from Briney, K. A. (2020, June 2). File Naming Convention Worksheet. California Institute of Technology. This resource was recently awarded a 2023 DataWorks! Prize Significant Achievement Award.

Think about your files

What related files are you working with?

Identify metadata (for example, date,

sample, experiment)

What information is needed to easily locate a specific file?

Abbreviate or encode metadata

Don't forget to document any codes!

Use versioning

Are you maintaining different versions of the same file?

Think about how you will search for your files

What comes first?

Deliberately separate metadata elements

Avoid spaces or special characters in your file names

Write down your naming conventions

Include a top-level README file on how to navigate the structure

Additional Resources

Get started with naming conventions!

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